

# **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2014-2018**

## **Mission**

To work on behalf of Kentucky's veteran community and their families in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and nation.

## **Vision**

Kentucky veterans, the men and women who served honorably on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces, will receive the highest quality of support and care involving the agency's nursing home services, burial services and honors, federal and state veteran benefits and also includes caring for our homeless and disabled veterans.

## **Values**

Veteran centric, people oriented, forward leaning, commitment to excellence, problem solving, integrity, accountability, and collaborative

## **Strategic Goals**

Deliver quality programs and services efficiently and effectively that meet the needs of the veteran community.

- Provide high quality advocacy for all Kentucky veterans and to increase the percentage of veterans in Kentucky who receive USDVA compensation and benefits the service member has earned.
- High quality, long term health care services are provided to veterans at the least possible cost to the state.
- Provide a dignified burial for veterans and their spouses/underage dependents.
- Reduce veteran homelessness in the state by focusing on veterans who are "at risk" of becoming homeless.
- Assist unemployed veterans with employment opportunities, such as job fairs and job retraining programs.
- Strengthen mental health services for veterans in collaboration with the Division of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities.
- Focus on a strong partnership with the USDVA and participate in outreach activities that benefit Kentucky veterans.
- Satisfy customer needs externally and internally and enhance qualitative outcomes.
- Communicate effectively with the public about KDVA services.
- Maximize the recruitment and retention of a productive workforce.

## Executive Summary

In 2013, Kentucky was home to 335,000 thousand veterans. This is a sizeable portion and valued constituency of Kentucky's population. Commissioner Ken Lucas, Major Ret. (USAF), heads the department and is staffed by 820 employees to operate central office, three long term care facilities, four cemeteries, a Benefits branch, a homeless veterans program, and a women's veteran coordinator. Construction for a new nursing home in Radcliffe will begin in September 2013.

## Programs

**\*Commissioner's Office** is dedicated to advancing the mission, implementing the agency's vision and adhering to its values. The Commissioner's Office in Frankfort consists of a Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Staff Attorney, Fiscal Manager, Human Resources Manager, Public Information Officer, and a Division Director each for Cemeteries and Field Operations (Benefits). These individuals provide Department-wide support.

**\*Cemeteries** once fully in place will meet the federal VA's goal to ensure that 90% of Kentucky's veterans live within 75 miles of a veteran's cemetery. The cemeteries inter both casketed and cremated remains with a dignified burial service with full military honors of all veterans. Eligible dependents (spouses and dependent children) of veterans and active duty service men and women are also interred at Kentucky's State Veterans Cemeteries. The costs to build the state veteran cemetery are borne by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Maintenance and daily operations costs are absorbed by the state budget. Beginning federal FY 2013, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) contributed \$722 for each veteran interred at the cemeteries. KDVA asks for \$400 for the interment of eligible dependents of veterans or active service members.

KDVA helps provide military funeral honors to all veterans by funding the Burial Honors Program, which gives a small stipend to Veterans Service Organizations for performing honors. The program costs \$130,000 annually to operate. The department also supports an Indigent Veterans Burial Program, providing funds to help cover the cost of funeral arrangements for indigent veterans.

A fifth cemetery is designated to be built in southeastern KY. Land was purchased by Leslie Co. officials for construction. The timeframe for construction and completion of construction remains to be determined.

**\*Field Operations** staff assists veterans throughout the state in obtaining federal and state benefits they have earned. In 2006, the Governor and Kentucky General Assembly set into statute a minimum staffing level of five (5) Veterans Benefits Regional Administrators and twenty (20) Veterans Benefits Field Representatives. Field representatives are located strategically throughout the Commonwealth to ensure that veterans in every county have the opportunity to personally meet with a representative. These meetings help to ensure that veterans in Kentucky receive the compensation and pension they earned for their active duty service and are made aware of the federal and state programs for which they qualify, including VA healthcare.

In 2011, Field Operations implemented the EVet Assist program which allows the veteran in Kentucky to file their claim electronically at the state level rather than through burdensome, repetitive paperwork. The EVet Assist program was financially supported by the Kentucky Veteran Trust Fund.

KDVA assists Veterans Service Organization in training their service officers to ensure that veterans who seek help from these organizations receive quality guidance and representation. While a full time dedicated women's veteran's coordinator would be a significant addition to the staff, budget cuts have not allowed KDVA to hire for that position. The women's veteran coordinator duties are a collateral assignment to a woman veteran working for the agency; however, the importance of women veterans to the mission of the military is unmistakable. The department is committed to the well-being of our women veterans.

KDVA employs a Homeless Veterans Coordinator with a doctoral degree in Psychology and certification in drug and alcohol abuse counseling. This coordinator oversees a homeless veterans' transition facility in Lexington run by the Volunteers of America (VOA) and funded in part by the department. Further, the coordinator administers the Homeless Veterans Trust Fund, which makes small, one-time payments to veterans and their dependents to keep them in their homes or to assist them off of the streets. Finally, the coordinator stays abreast of opportunities to help homeless veterans throughout the state.

**\*Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers** provide long term health care for honorably discharged veterans in Wilmore, Hazard, and Hanson. A fourth home is designated to be built in Radcliffe, next to Ft. Knox Army base by 2015. This facility is slated to house one hundred and twenty (120) veterans under the new "community living" concept. The project will be funded through a federal matching grant for state home construction with the USDVA providing 65% and the state provide 35% of the total cost of construction. The projected cost of the project is \$37 million dollars. Kentucky is currently allotted 813 beds for USDVA per diem funding.

Veteran residents are typically disabled, indigent or imminently indigent. The veterans' homes provide health and psychosocial services such as nursing, rehabilitative therapies, therapeutic activities, social services, medical and administrative staff. When veterans are cared for in a state veterans' home, they are eligible for USDVA funding. This funding pays about 40% of the cost of care, making OKVC a cost-effective care provider; the same funding would not be available to veterans residing in community nursing homes. The veterans' homes are preparing to become Medicare and Medicaid certified.

A thirty-six (36) bed expansion at WKVC was completed 2012. And, electronic medical records will also be implemented in the new biennium in order to improve the quality of healthcare for the veteran.

## **Conclusion**

KDVA employees are immensely devoted and firmly committed to serving those who have served our nation. The mission, vision, and values of our organization are clearly reflected within each organizational entity. We have worked long and hard to establish ourselves within the communities we serve and to brand our organization as one of high standards with great expectations of its employees. We are committed to preserving the integrity that we so diligently worked to attain and consistently

strive to uphold, and sustain the high level of care and quality of life services that our staff provides and our veterans deserve.